



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

“What Must I Do to Be Saved? part II: Terms of Salvation” TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] We pray that we may be able to think Thy thoughts after Thee. So we commit the hour to Thee and we commit each one present to Thee.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Tonight our subject is “What Must I Do to be Saved? or The Terms of Salvation” - second installment. And I'm going to read just two verses for our Scripture reading and they are verses 12 and 13 of John chapter 1. John chapter 1 verses 12 and 13.

“But as many as received him, he gave to them the authority to become children of God. The ones who believed in his name: Who, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God were born.”

Now, that is John 1:12 and 13 and I have translated it literally from the Greek text for you. We are discussing in our studies at the present moment the human side of the question how do we come to Jesus Christ. We know that from the divine side, at least I hope we know by now, that the answer to the question how do we come to Christ is the

infallible grace of God or the efficacious grace of God. And we know also, I hope, that historically the Christian church has given the answer to the human side of the question how do we come to Jesus Christ.

The church has historically given the answer, we come by believing. In Romans chapter 3 in verse 28, the Apostle Paul expresses it like this. He says, “For we reckon that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.” And Luther when he rendered that verse rendered it this way, “For we reckon that a man is justified by faith alone apart from the works of the law.” There is strictly speaking no word alone in the Greek text at point but Luther properly inserted the word because it is theologically required by the statement, “A man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.”

Now, we said last time that in evangelism, that being done by evangelicals today, that we are plagued by two errors -- probably more than two -- but I am thinking of two particularly. First, a false emphasis is placed upon -- a misunderstanding of repentance exists among many who are preaching the gospel. And we talked about that last time. And a second error that is common today in the preaching of the gospel is a false application of the truth of the dedicated life. Now, there is no question but that the New Testament teaches that Christians are to live a life dedicated to the Lord, but we must distinguish between that which is Christian life truth and that which is the method of coming to Jesus Christ for salvation. And I think many evangelicals are being seriously misled and most do not want to think through some of these issues and consequently they are just led along by some who do not think straight theologically, in my opinion.

Now, last week we considered some of the terms proposed by evangelists upon which we receive the benefits of Christ’s death for us. Now, let me just before we look at them remind you of this that historically Christianity has said that salvation depends upon the work of Jesus Christ. That is his virgin birth, his blood atonement, his bodily resurrection, and specifically the Evangelicals had believed that our salvation is related to

the atoning work of Jesus Christ in his death for us upon the cross at Calvary. In other words, our salvation is founded upon what Christ did upon the cross.

Now, evangelicals have also believed that we gain an interest in that work that Christ has done for us by believing. Now, those two things are important. Our salvation depends upon what Christ did, and we are painted by the term, upon the terms of believing. Now, it is possible, for us if we are not clear on either one of these points, to be misled. Fortunately, many Evangelicals are not misled on the first point. They know and there has been enough preaching along this line. They know that their salvation is dependent upon the vicarious work of Jesus Christ on the cross. And most of us are very careful to ask the question, as we listen to preaching, is he preaching Christ crucified? In other words, is there within his message a clear presentation of the death of Christ and that our salvation depends upon that substitutionary death for us.

But often, what we gain by being clear in preaching the gospel and what we gain in ascertaining that the man to whom we are listening is doing this, we lose because we’re not careful to consider the terms upon which this saving work of Jesus Christ is offered to men. For you see, it is possible to preach a grace salvation with one breath and to take it away with the next. It is possible to talk about the wonderful work that God has done for us in the gift of his Son, but then if we say it is available to us on the basis of our doing something, we have, in effect, taken the gracious work of Jesus Christ and made it available to men on the basis of works. And there we have a works salvation again. So you see it is possible for us to be misled, and there, we want to talk as we have been talking, we want to talk again tonight about some of the terms upon which the salvation of Jesus Christ is offered to us.

Now, we last time we considered these first four terms. The first, believe and do good works. And that is sometimes related to James’ statement in James chapter 2 “Faith without works is dead.” Now, of course, if we were to offer salvation to men on the basis of belief in the saving work of Jesus Christ and do good works, we would be violating the

eternal grace of God. We would be violating the free grace of God. We would be violating the sovereign grace of God. And we talked about that last time because it’s very important for us to realize that our salvation is by grace. And if it depends upon good works on our part, we have abandoned grace as Paul puts it in Romans chapter 11 in verse 6. And I think this is an important verse for its principle. He says, “But if by grace, no longer is it of works, else grace is no longer is grace.”

Now, notice that text. You have, of course, the opposite also in the English text but I’m just reading the Greek text. This is what Paul wrote. You have a translation. I’m reading the inspired text. You are not reading the inspired text. And I’m sorry, of course, to tell you that but it’s the truth. I’m reading the inspired text and this is what it says. Now, “If by grace no longer is it of works, else grace no longer becomes grace.” So you can see that we cannot mingle these two principles of a gracious salvation and a works basis. We cannot talk about salvation by grace if we talk about salvation by works. We cannot talk about works if we are talking about grace. These are two principles that do not mix. They are like oil and water. And so works and grace are just as different theologically. We cannot have a salvation by grace and tell him to do something because thus we are mingling things that cannot be mingled.

Now, I think that we have little difficulty with that. So let’s move on. The second term that we discussed was believe and repent. And I mentioned that repent is the negative side and a necessary side of faith. It does not mean, however, to be sorry or to weep. And if we mean by this that we must believe in Jesus Christ and weep over our past sins in order to be saved, we have again introduced an element of works in our salvation. If we mean simply a change of mind which, of course, should produce a change of attitude, then it’s all right to say that a man must believe and repent in order to be saved.

Now, this word means to change the mind. It involves a consequent change of heart, but remember, it is given by God. Remember in Acts chapter 5 when Peter

preaches, he says that “Repentance is given by God.” It is not something that we ourselves are able to do in ourselves apart from divine help. In chapter 11 of the book of Acts, Peter states the same thing when he’s explaining what happened in Cornelius’ house. He says in chapter 11 verse 18 and, “When they heard these things, they became silent, and they glorified God, saying, (consequently then or consequently also) to the Gentiles, God has given repentance unto life.” So “God has given repentance unto life.” If we are talking about repentance then in a sense of a change of mind which results in a change of attitude, and if we realize it is the negative side faith and a necessary part of faith, it’s all right for us to say in order to be saved the man must say believe and repent. And if we also remember that that repentance is a gift of God just as faith is a gift of God. If we, however, mean by this believe and repent that one must come down to the front and weep and cry and be visibly sorry for his sins, then that is a works and according to the New Testament this would be an improper term of salvation.

Now, I think it is all right to say believe and repent because Paul says that. It’s all right to preach it. I would, however, remind you of this. For every time you find the word repentance in the New Testament as a condition of salvation, I’m going to go out on a limb and make a guess, you have faith, at least, five times. In other words, our message should be characterized by faith if we follow the proportion of the use of these terms in the New Testament. So believe and repent, beware of that. Be sure that it is scripturally presented. I’d like to remind you of this that the Gospel of John was written in order to bring men to life in Christ. Remember John says, “Many of the signs truly be Jesus which are not in this book but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and that in believing that you might have life through his ways.” In other words, John simply saying I wrote this book that you might have life, life in Christ.

And isn’t it interesting he does not use the word “repent” once in his gospel? So if that’s the necessary part of our salvation, we could honestly say to John, if he were here, look John you omitted something essential. I’m sure he would have replied but I

included what you meant by repent, change of mind, in my current beliefs, because when a man believes in Christ he stops trusting in whatever he has been trusting in before. And so if he were trusting in his good works or his culture or his Reformation or his good looks or his preacher or his church or in the ordinances that he has undergone or whatever it may be that you may be trusting in, if he begins to trust in Jesus Christ, he has changed his mind. And thus he has repented.

And I think it’s interesting too that the greatest epistle of the New Testament in the presentation of the work of salvation which is the epistle of what? To what? To whom? What’s the greatest epistle in the New Testament on the way of salvation? What is it? Anyone? Romans, right. How many times does Paul use “repent” in Romans? Once. Once and not in the key sections of the epistle. Once. So when we talk about to people about the gospel and we say to them Jesus Christ died for you and they say what must I do to be saved? Don’t say, be sorry, weep, go down to the front at the altar. Pray through. Cry. Tell them what? Believe. That’s what John says. And that’s really what Paul says. We’re going to talk about that a lot next Monday night but we leave this. That’s review. And here again believe and confess Christ. There are people who tell us that the way to receive Jesus Christ is to put your trust in him and to come down front and confess him in the midst of the congregation or in the evangelistic meeting.

Now, we pointed to Romans chapter 10 verses 9 and 10 and suggested to you that the context of that passage is not that of a public meeting at all. And that the expressions “believe and confess” used in those two verses were the inward and the outward side of much the same thing. To believe is the inward cause. To confess is the outward issue. And both are directed to God as we read in Romans chapter 10 in verse 13 when Paul in this context refers to the confession he says, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” And so if you confess Christ is to call upon the name of the Lord in order to be saved. So believe and confess Christ. That’s perfectly all right if we remember that is the inevitable issue of faith. The man who believes in Jesus Christ will

confess him but he’s not talking about any public confession. There are some people who are so timid that if we made salvation dependant upon coming down before a great congregation and confessing Christ they would die of heart failure before they could be saved. And I’m sure that God would never make our salvation dependent upon a work like that. So the confession is the response of a heart that has believed in God, the Father of Jesus Christ.

Now, we also talked then about believe and be baptized. And we said, as we began our discussion of this, that this is no mere academic question because many of the greatest Christians who have the used of God in the most obvious great ways, men such as Luther, men such as Calvin, Whitefield, Wesley, did not believe it was necessary to be baptized in order to be saved. And if we are saying that it is necessary to be baptized in order to be saved, we are suggesting that some of the greatest servants of God were not really saved for they did not believe the doctrine.

Now, we also stressed another thing. We stressed the deceptiveness of these errors. For example, in this case there is no denial of the great facts of Christianity. When a man preaches that we must believe and be baptized, if you were listening to someone preach the gospel in this way, you could say amen right through his gospel, as I said last time. He would begin perhaps by saying “Now, Jesus Christ was the Son of God.” And you would say “Amen.” Now, “Jesus Christ was born of a virgin.” And you would say “Amen.” “Jesus Christ went about doing good demonstrating that he was absolutely sinless, the sinless Son of God.” And you would say “Yes.” And he would say “Jesus Christ went to the cross.” And you would say “Yes.”

Now, he’s getting to the heart of the matter. And then he would say “Jesus Christ bore the judgment of God. He cried out “My God my God why hast thou forsaken me, and there he was the sin offering for us.” And we would say “Yes. He’s really preaching.” And then he would say “He was placed in the grave and on the third day he arose again from the dead in token of the fact that God accepted the finished work of the

Lord Jesus Christ.” And we would say “Yes. Yes that’s right.” And then he would say “Now, all that’s necessary is for you to believe.” And we would say “Yes.” And then he would say “And be baptized in order to be saved.” And if you had any understanding you would say “NO.” Because the minute, of course, he had done that then he’s taken away everything that he has said that is good up to that point. He has preached grace and he has preached free salvation and then he has taken it all back by saying you must be baptized in order to be saved. So you see it is very deceptive.

Now, this is really the error of Galatianism. Paul wrote an Epistle to the Galatians and he wrote an epistle about this very court except that he was talking about circumcision. Now, circumcision in the Old Testament was the sign or the seal of the righteousness of faith. A Jewish boy was circumcised in order to mark him out as belonging to the covenant that God had made with Israel. And it was designed to be a sign and a seal of the righteousness of faith. In other words, everyone who was circumcised was supposed to have been a member of the covenant who would believe, and on the basis of it faith be reckoned, to belong to the true Israel. Paul argues that point in Romans chapter 4. He said Abraham was justified before Genesis chapter 17 when circumcision was introduced and so salvation did not depend upon the rite. The rite was the seal. It was the sign.

Now, baptism is a similar rite. It is a sign. It is a seal. It does not procure anything for us. It’s like the label on a can. Who cares about the label unless you’re contesting then you might care about the label more than the contents but it is the contents of a can or a box that is significant. And so baptism is the label just as circumcision was the label.

Now, Paul wrote the Epistle to the Galatians in order to impress upon them the fact that if they were being told, as they were told in the early church because they were Jewish believers for the most part, except a man be circumcised he cannot be saved. Paul wrote the Epistle to the Galatians to show them that this error of salvation through

ceremony was a violation of the principal of grace. He said “If I’m still preaching circumcision why am I still being persecuted, then is the offense of the cross safe?” If for example, I can go out and preach the cross and then that the benefits of the cross are due to some work we do then there is no offense in the cross because men can say I did do something then he could get to heaven on the basis of his merit at least did that. But when you preach the cross you are preaching that there is nothing that men could do not a thing. And that’s offensive because men don’t like to be told they cannot please God in themselves. God’s saying I don’t want anything of you. I cannot. I cannot. I cannot. I will not. I will not accept anything that is touched with Adam not even your undergoing to ceremony. So he wrote the whole epistle to attack salvation by ceremony, circumcision. And we talked about baptism. It is the precise equivalent and consequently for us to say that we preach a Christ who died for men and then saying he’s available to us on the basis baptism, we have introduced a ritual salvation or a salvation by works. So believe and be baptized. We referred to Acts chapter 2 verse 38.

Now, I didn’t have time to refer to a lot of texts which have to do with this. There are men who appeal to Mark chapter 16 in verse 16 for example. You might turn to that text for just a moment. In Mark chapter 16 in verse 16 we read, “He who has believed and been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.” Now, I’m not going to say anything about whether the 16th chapter of the book of Mark is genuine from verses 8 on through the end of the chapter. If you have a Bible with any kind of textual notes in it at all you will notice that texture critics debate the genuineness of verses 9 through 20 of Mark chapter 16. And it’s too big a subject and, frankly, you wouldn’t understand what I was talking about if I went into detail on this point because you would have to know Greek and you would have to know the principles of textual criticism but probably the great majority of Evangelicals do not believe these verses are genuine. That is that they were not a part of Mark’s original gospel.

Now, we’re not saying that part of the Bible is not the Bible, mind you. You are intelligent enough in my systematic theology class, I hope, to realize that it is the Greek text that is the inspired text and not the English translation. And we know enough to know that scribes down through the years have added things to the New Testaments. Scribes were human. Apostles were inspired of God. And the question is did the apostle or in this case Mark the evangelists did Mark write it or not. That’s the point. If he wrote it, it’s inspired. If he didn’t write it, it’s not inspired even though it’s in our English translation. Well that’s a technical question and we need not deal with it now. It isn’t that important for us. I want you to notice that actually this text even if it is genuine does not really say what many think that it says. He says “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved but he that believeth it not shall be condemned.” Notice that in the second clause baptism is left out. He says “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,” but he does not say he that does believeth and is not baptized shall be condemned. As you can see from this that the key term is the word “believe.” And baptism is simply the confession of faith. And it is not found in the negative side. It makes it evident that that is not the principal points even in the text as it is found here.

Now, there are some other texts but, after all, we’ve been going for about half and hour reviewing and I think we ought to get on tonight since I have something that I believe is important for us to work on. Sometime we will talk about Acts chapter 22 in verse 16 and 1 Peter chapter 3 in verse 21. These are texts that are sometimes introduced by people who believe it’s necessary to be baptized in order to be saved but there are good explanations for these texts which harmonize the word of God and do not introduce a ritual salvation. The fifth term that we want to discuss is believe and surrender to God. Believe and surrender to God or sometimes as it is sometimes presented just surrender. What we need to do is to surrender. Surrender. And the text that it might suggest to us is a text such as Romans chapter 12 verses 1 and 2. Let me only say this about this term

believe and surrender to God that the unsaved are dead. Paul says we are dead in trespasses and sins.

Now, we do not have any capacity to surrender to God. We are blind. We are deaf. We are alienated from God. We are in rebellion against God. We are dead. The Bible uses every kind of language to describe the facts that we do not have the capacity for responding to God, naturally. Whatever response we make to God is initiated by God. In other words, God has worked. When you see a man that does respond to God, his heart becomes warm to the things of God. He becomes interested. He is interested in coming to a Bible class although he is not yet a Christian. Or he is interested in hearing the word of God. Or he’s concerned. Or he’s under conviction. You can be sure that that does not come naturally. That is the product of the working of the Holy Spirit in his heart. That is efficacious grace at work in his heart, if he comes to the Lord through this. So the idea that men are to surrender to God in order to be saved is utterly contrary to what the Bible says about us in our character. As a matter of fact, the text Romans chapter 12 verses 1 and 2 which tells us to yield by our bodies a living sacrifice, that’s the Greek expression for surrender, that is the addressed to what class of individual? Christians, right. It is addressed to believers.

Look at it, Romans chapter 12 verses 1 and 2. Now, “I beseech you brethren.” Now, that’s brethren with a little b. Now, “I beseech you brethren (any believer in Jesus Christ) through the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice.” That word “present” is a word that is sometimes translated yield. It’s the equivalent of surrender. By the way, the surrender, so far as I remember, is not found in the New Testament at all in the translation. This is the Greek equivalent to present your body as a living sacrifice, but notice it is addressed to believers. Apparently, that it is possible for a brother to not present his body to the Lord and so the apostle must address himself to believers and say present your bodies. So surrender is something that a Christian can do because he possesses the enablement of the Holy Spirit but it’s not anything that someone

outside of Christ can do. So for a man to get up and preach the gospel to an audience and preach about Jesus Christ and say now surrender to God, he’s calling upon men to do something that they cannot do. They cannot surrender. And, of course, he’s on the simplest analysis of this term. He’s using a term that’s not used in the New Testament.

I must confess. I’m old fashioned. Now, you would expect an old man like me to be old fashioned and I am. I’m very old fashioned. I believe in using the biblical terms. I believe that it is very rare that we are able to find terms that are more suitable to the preaching of truth than the terms that God has given us in his word. I think it’s very rare when men are able to find better words than God has selected. Now, I have never been able to find a better word. I’ve always discovered that when I thought I had a better word. I usually discovered that my word I left myself open to some error that God’s word would have protected me from. So I like to use the biblical terms. I’m just that old fashioned. I like the good old biblical terms. They make sense to me. So when I read in the New Testament that we’re never called upon to surrender, I must say I’m a little suspicious when I hear a man keep saying now surrender, surrender, surrender. I’m just a little suspicious. I want to say where’d he get that brother? Where’d he get that? Where’s that found in the Bible? And if he points me to a text like yield I’d say yes that’s right it does say yield or present your bodies but noticed it’s addressed to believers. They’re ones who yield. So you know it’s very much like a man suppose I were to stand out in front of Believers Chapel and pull out a knife and cut open an artery and should stand out there and see the blood gushing out. And, finally, I would probably become faint and fall over and ultimately I would be dead and you would walk out and maybe some of you would take a look at me and some of you would go away and say “Lewis get up surrender. Get up.” Why it’d be useless, of course, I’m dead. I have no life. Well, that is just about how foolish it is for us to say to a man who is dead in sin surrender to God. You might also say if you could surrender to God why would you

need the gospel for anyway. Well, I don’t want to belabor this too much. Let’s go on to the next.

Believe and make Christ Lord. Now, this is sometimes called preaching the lordship of Jesus Christ. And I want to spend a little time on this because I think this is one of the most subtle of the errors abounding today. I have a little magazine here. It’s called His. I like this magazine. It’s a pretty good magazine. It’s the magazine of the Intermercy to Christian Fellowships. I like that organization. It’s done a lot of good works for the Lord down through the years. In fact, in many cases I think it has done an outstanding piece of work. Like most human organization its value is ultimately dependent upon those who make up its organization. If there is a good leader in the area, the work is usually a good work. If there is a poor leader in the area, the work is usually poor.

Now, I feel and I must say this. I feel this that God works most completely through the local church. And, therefore, I feel that all organizations that are detached from the local church are God’s second best. But I only say this in order to tell you, frankly, what I feel. I like this organization. I like this magazine. And I’ve taken this magazine for sometime and I get something out of it every time it comes. I probably got something out of this issue but I must say that my blood boiled over one article which I looked at. And I’m going to say something about it. And I feel very strongly that many of our Christian organization are so weak in their theological perspectives, in their ability to see theological issues that they allow the saints to misled when if they just had some theological perception they wouldn’t fall into this trap.

Now, this article is entitled, “Take My Life. Let it Be.” And it is an article by a man whose name is Alex Wilson. And I do not know this man. I hope he’s a very good brother in Jesus Christ. And I hope he’ll forgive me for dragging this theological linen out before my theological class but, I’m doing it because what he has written is wrong. And you need to be warned against it. So you won’t fall into the trap.

Now, the basis of this article is, in effect, that if we do not accept Jesus Christ as Lord, we cannot have him as savior. Now, that is the idea that he is presenting. And he makes some statements in it to the effect that if Jesus Christ is not Lord of our lives, he is not our savior. Now, that is essentially what he is trying to say but frankly, his thoughts are so muddled theologically that occasionally he comes up with a good idea in the midst of his confusion. And so frankly it’s very difficult to know exactly what he is saying all the time. He’s not consistent. He finally winds up on a note we must call him Lord if he is to be our savior and I would say amen to that. So I find myself reading one stanza and one verse of this thing or one sentence of it saying fine good the next sentence uh uh then yes no yes yes yes no yes yes yes NO uh yes yes. That’s the way I read it, you know. It’s very deceptive kind of literature in which you could agree with four or five sentences and then suddenly there is something that comes in that you cannot agree with. You know that’s very deceptive.

Now, he makes this statement so the New Testament doesn’t distinguish between ordinary Christians and fully surrendered Christians called disciples. Now, you know if he had stopped that sentence after Christians, the New Testament doesn’t distinguish between ordinary Christians and fully surrendered Christians all of us in this room, I hope, would say oh but it does. It does. Then he adds these little words, called disciples, and argues about the meaning of the term disciple. But aside from that the New Testament does distinguish between ordinary Christians and fully surrendered Christians. Or to put it this way, the New Testament distinguishes between Christians who are carnal believers and Christians who are spiritual believers. That’s just as plain as day. All you have to do is to read 1 Corinthians 2 and 3.

Now, mind you this fellow’s read 1 Corinthians 2 and 3. He goes on to say after he said second the core of the New testament’s evangelistic message is Christ’s lordship I would say yes to that but he means by that making Christ Lord of your life not calling him Lord. But then he says someone may point out. Now, he must have had me in mind

then, someone may point out that Paul classifies Christians as either carnal or spiritual in 1 Corinthians 2:14 through 3:3. Yes, brother you should have paid attention to this. I would say. Then he said isn’t this the same as saying some have received Christ only as savior and others have surrendered to his lordship as well. Yes, that’s precisely what it is. With a few minor variations I would say that’s essentially what Paul has said in those verses. He said there is a natural man. He’s not a Christian at all. Then there is a carnal believer who is a believer but he’s a babe in Christ. He’s willful. He is and Paul mentions the particular sins that are that he is engaged in, and then he says that he that is spiritual is one who is not examined by any man who walks by the Spirit.

Now, if that isn’t a distinction between Christians I don’t know what is. So he says two observations must be made. First, the sin among the Corinthians at the time Paul wrote doesn’t prove that he had originally offered them salvation apart from their appenant surrender to Christ but that’s beside the point. The point is, are there two kinds of Christians? If a man is a Christian and a carnal Christian, then it’s obvious that being a Christian does not involve making Christ the lord of your life. In other words, it is possible for a man to be a Christian when Jesus Christ is not completely Lord of all areas of his life. That should be obvious. Therefore, the condition for becoming a Christian cannot be making Christ Lord of all the areas of our lives if there are Christians that don’t have him as Lord in all the areas of their life. And, of course, all the passages of the New Testament that talk Christians falling into sin, that talk about the necessity for Christians to confess their sin, that talk about the necessity of discipline in the family of God, it should be obvious to us that this doctrine is wrong.

Now, I don’t have time to go through the whole article but you see that is very misleading. Now, that would disturb a Christian. That would make a Christian feel that his salvation really depended upon believing in Jesus Christ and being perfect as a Christian. Because if he is really lord of our lives in all areas of our lives that means that we are completely surrendered to him and only those who are completely surrendered

are saved. That’s what that ultimately comes to. That’s a works salvation. And if it’s not a works salvation, it surely is a claim to sinless perfection. Of course, he would deny this but this is what this leads to logically, theologically.

James Packer said a very good thing on one of the tapes that I had been listening to recently by Mr. Packer, Dr. Packer. He said that “A half-truth preached as a whole truth is a whole falsehood.” There’s a great deal of truth in the idea that Jesus Christ is Lord. In fact, no one can be saved who doesn’t believe that Jesus Christ is Lord. That’s the truth. That’s the truth of it. But there is all the difference in the world between acknowledging Jesus Christ as the supreme Lord and making him Lord of all of our lives, all the difference in the world between acknowledging him as Lord and as making him lord of your life. Well now let me say it again. There is all the difference in the world in acknowledging Christ to be Lord. Nobody can be saved who does not acknowledge him to be Lord, the Godman but there is all the difference in the world between that and having him Lord of all the areas of our life, completely surrender to him. Every Christian wishes Jesus Christ to be Lord of all the areas of his life. There isn’t a Christian, I don’t believe, who wishes to call him Lord and then say I don’t really want him to be Lord. If we have the new life, we wish him to be Lord of our lives. That doesn’t mean that he is Lord of our lives. Well, that’s the reason for this kind of doctrine that is so predominant today? It infiltrates all of our evangelical organizations at one time or another. What’s the reason for it? Well, Evangelists and Bible teachers and preachers look around among Christians and they say you know this audience says it is an audience of believers that when you look at their lives you don’t see much evidence of Christianity. Perhaps, the failure lies in the fact that we have made Christianity too easily available. And so they talk about too much easy-believism.

About ten years ago, I was on a platform with a man who was preaching this kind of doctrine. Oh we had a good time that week. He would preach one thing and I would get up and preach another. There were a few people who were catching the difference

too. [Laughter] Some of them weren’t. Some of them just sat and listened and didn’t notice a difference at all. But he got up and he said in introducing why he was going to stress this. He said there is too much easy-believism with syncopated Jazz music type of Christianity. Those are precise quotes. I wrote them down as he said them. And I must say there’s a lot of truth in what he was saying.

If you look at evangelicalism, it is true. There are lots of people in the evangelical camp who are confessing that they have believed in Jesus Christ, but when you look at their lives there is very little evidence that Jesus Christ is really operative in their lives at all. We all know that there is failure in evangelicalism. And I must confess, it’s not when I look at you when I see that. It’s when I look at the mirror at myself and think of my own life. I often realize how short I come when I think of what the New Testament sets forth as the ideal of the Christian life but we must not correct error with error. We must not, because we see there is failure, change our message of salvation and our terms upon which it is presented. We must not, because there has been failure in response, we must not change God’s word. We must continue to proclaim, but we must explain what this means. And if I say to you, you must believe in order to be saved and some of you get saved and some don’t, some confess it, but it doesn’t seem to be operative in your life, I must not say, now better look around for another word. So while you make Christ Lord perhaps that’ll get the job done because you see if I do this, I am liable to fall into theological error in principle and that is precisely what they have done.

Now, the error of the term, as I see it, is this. If we say that we must believe and make Christ Lord in order to be saved, the first thing I would like to say by way of criticism of this just what I said a minute ago to confess him as Lord is different from making him Lord of our lives. Everybody must confess Christ as Lord, if you’re going to be saved. That is confessing who he is. No demi-god can save us. We must have a complete God as a Savior. Only God can save us and that’s why we must say that Jesus Christ is Lord. And no Christian ever becomes a Christian who does not acknowledge the

deity of Jesus Christ. That is fundamental. That’s why John said these are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ and that in believing you might have life through his name.

So number one, second, this term confuses the saving and sanctifying work of God. To acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord believing in him who died for me is to bring me salvation. To make him Lord of my life is the whole work of sanctification. And the whole procedure of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts after we have believed in Christ is designed to conform us to Jesus Christ, to make him Lord of our lives. In other words, to acknowledge him as Lord is to be saved. To have him practically Lord of all the areas of our life is the work of sanctification which is carried on by the Holy Spirit in our lives after we have been saved.

By the way, we have a beautiful illustration of this in the case of a man by the name of Lot. Do you remember him? Do you remember Lot? He was a believer wasn’t he? How do you know he was a believer? Well, because the New Testament says, righteous Lot. He vexed himself living among the Sodomites. By the way, I was over in LeTourneau College today preaching to faculty prayer meeting and some of the students. And I walked down the hall and there were some, in the Bible department over there, there were some clippings from newspapers, Xeroxed copies, and so forth of various things about the students apparently collected all over the country. And I stopped to look at some of them and there was a Xeroxed copy there of an article that appeared in one of our papers about a theological test that was given to a group of people about the Bible.

And one of the answers was, one of the questions was, what is Sodom and Gomorrah? Who are Sodom and Gomorrah? And somebody had answered lovers. [Laughter] Sodom and Gomorrah are lovers and then the question had been asked, what are the four gospels? And somebody had answered Matthew, Mark, Luther, and John. [Laughter]

Well, now, coming back to Sodom, Lot had pitched his tent over against Sodom and remember Lot was a perfect illustration of the worldly Christian. He did not have Christ or God as Lord of his life. But he was righteous. He had believed. He had put his trust in Abraham’s God. He was just as much a believer in God as Abraham. He is just as surely in heaven as Abraham because he trusted in the same work, the work of the Redeemer to come. But Lot was very unhappy. He was very untruthful and what he did had long lasting consequences because he is an illustration of a worldly Christian, but he was a Christian. You see Lot needed sanctification. And when we talk about making Christ Lord, we are making sanctification a condition of salvation.

Thirdly, this term ignores the existence of carnal Christians, and we have seen from 1 Corinthians chapter 3 that there are such as or may be here described as carnal Christians. How can we say that we must make Christ Lord of our life to be saved and then acknowledge that there are such individuals as carnal Christians, and they are?

Now, mind you, people often say at this point, but God doesn’t approve carnal Christians. Of course, he doesn’t approve carnal Christians. He wants Christians to be spiritual but he, at least, knows that they exist. He’s very unhappy about it. He wants us, who are carnal Christians, to become spiritual, but he still acknowledges that there are such as are carnal Christians.

I was once attending a young people’s meeting, and it was an InterVarsity meeting too by the way. This is not nice to attack an InterVarsity, but sometimes it’s good for you to learn enough to be able to test everything you hear even at an InterVarsity/Campus Crusade even -- tell it’s not in the Gath, publish it not in Ashkelon less the uncircumcised Philistines from some other seminary hear -- but test everything that even a Dallas seminary man says. They can err too. When I was attending a young people’s conference once about twelve years ago and I heard a man get up and say if you’re not walking by the Spirit you’re not saved. Now, I want to say it’s wonderful to walk by the Spirit and God wishes that we walk by the Spirit. He has given us the Holy Spirit by

which to walk. And I do think there is a sense in which we can say that if you are a genuine Christian you will have a definite change of life when you become a Christian, but to say that we’re not saved if we don’t walk by the Spirit is to go beyond the teaching of the New Testament.

Now, when this man comes to that point and he does what my Baptist friend over in New Albany, Mississippi says and when he comes to 1 Corinthians chapter 2, he does not answer what Paul says here. He does, as I say as my friend says, he does a toe dance around those texts of Scripture. I like that expression. We were talking about some thing over there about some critical verse, and I was talking about listening to a man, and he said “What did he say about it? I said “Well he really didn’t quite.” “Oh,” he said “He did a toe dance around it.” I said “Yes that’s better then I could have said it. That is precisely what he did. He did a toe dance around that text of Scripture.”

Fourth, this idea to make Christ Lord hinders assurance and growth. Because, you see, if our salvation depends upon making Christ Lord of our lives and we are honest with ourselves, we will acknowledge there are areas of our life in which he is not Lord. Isn’t that right? How many of you would like to stand up right now and say there is no area of my life in which Jesus Christ is not complete Lord. I give you an opportunity now to stand up. Ladies first. [Laughter] Over here on this side. Over here. Men. Men.

Now, wait I’m not being really funny. I know you are responding as if I’m trying to be funny. I’m really not trying to be funny. I’m trying to get over to you the fact that deep down in your heart you know that there’re areas of your life in which Jesus Christ is not yet Lord. And listen. I do think there is a sense in which if you know that you should immediately confess it, and you should go home and get down by the side of your bed and ask God to bring you to the place where you are in harmony with his will at that point. You know Paul said once “I know nothing against myself.” That’s what he said. “I know nothing against myself.” But he went on quickly to say because he was an apostle and had good theological perception.

He said “But even in this. I am not justified. For at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ, God will bring forth the hidden things of the heart. In other words, the chances are there are still things in my life that have not yet come to light. I don’t know what they are but I’m not completely yielded, probably. And as far as I know, I am. So you could have stood up if that were true of you. But if you were apostolic, you would have said there are still probably areas of my life, I don’t know about them yet, in which I’m not yet in harmony with the will of God.

So, to say that the man must make Christ Lord of his life in order to be saved, well that is becoming even more of false teaching than I had thought before. And finally, it negates the significance of salvation itself. If we can make him Lord of our lives before we are saved, if this is a condition for salvation, then why do we need a savior at all? If we can make him Lord of our lives in order to be saved, what do we need salvation for?

Now, it’s 8:30. Our time is up. I hope the way I have presented this tonight, at least, has made you think over some of these things. Now, next Monday night, the Lord willing, I want to talk on what is faith because it is obvious if all of these terms are wrong and they are wrong and if we receive everlasting life on the basis of believe and believe only, then it’s important that we understand what the Bible teaches about believe. Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for Thy word and Thy truth. And we pray that Thou will help us to think clearly not to be critical and censorious but, nevertheless, to be critical in our thinking theologically. Give us the spirit of the apostles who were very very adamant in their objection to error but at the same time were loving in their response to men who were in error. And we pray, O God, that we may be faithful to the life that Thou hast given us and we ask this.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.

“What Must I do to be Saved? part II” by S. Lewis Johnson
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